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MAYOR'S MESSAGE

TO THE

COMMON COUNCIL,

JANUARY, 1876.

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MESSAGE

OF THE

MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

TO THE

COMMON COUNCIL.

BOARD OF ALDERMEN,

January 3, 1876.

NEW YORK:
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1876.

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Executive Department, Mayor's Office,
New York, January 3, 1876.

To the Honorable, the Common Council:

Gentlemen—In prescribing the duties of the Mayor, the City Charter requires him not only to recommend to the Common Council, from time to time, all such measures as he may deem expedient, but also to communicate to you, at least once a year, "a general statement of the Fi- "nances, Government and Improvements of the City."

In compliance with that requirement, this general statement is made; and, conforming to custom, it is forwarded for your information at the beginning of the new year. The term of an Alderman is now but one year, and begins on the first Monday of January. This communication is addressed, therefore, to a new Board. But, fortunately for the City, and as a guarantee that the duties imposed upon you will be discharged with promptness and intelligence, and with a proper regard for the interests involved, many of the members of the present Board of Aldermen have already served with credit in the places to which a discerning constituency has but recently re-elected them,

and have a certain familiarity with the subjects to which reference must now be made.

The reports of the several Departments make detailed statements – each of the condition and operations of the Department from which it issues; they will all reach you in a short time, and afford full information concerning each of the matters to which can be given here but a brief discussion.

The first communication forwarded by me to the Common Council in January last ended with the assurance that I should endeavor so to perform the responsible duties then but just assumed, that, under my administration as chief magistrate, improvement in the affairs of the city might be secured. I am happy to be able to show now that, notwithstanding the difficulties under which the local government has been carried on during the past year, the results attained are, in many respects, and so far as the Mayor could shape them, such as should gratify all good citizens. To that extent, the baleful influences which controlled the administration of public affairs during and for some time after the war have been disregarded; the government has been conducted upon business principles; extravagance, demoralization and corruption have been checked; the standard of qualification for public office has been made higher; and public officers have been found who perform their functions with the fidelity due to public trusts. Whilst the scandals of frauds and peculations committed elsewhere by public functiona-

ries are still of shamefully frequent occurrence, nobody charges that such things continue here ; and it is thought that nothing is hazarded in saying that, during the last year, the government of this city—affecting as it does the interests of the whole country, and carried on with an expenditure of millions of money—has been administered with honesty throughout, and generally with economy and efficiency.

In May last, the Governor, in a special message, called the attention of the Legislature to the evils arising from our present unstable municipal systems, and to the existing necessity of adopting a permanent and uniform plan for the government of the cities of the State. There was thereupon adopted a concurrent resolution, which originated in the Senate, and which authorized the Governor to appoint a Commission to consider the subject, to devise a plan, and to report to the Legislature which meets tomorrow. A Commission has been appointed, accordingly, of twelve eminent citizens—chosen from various parts of the State, and without distinction as to political party. Some of them have had actual experience of the difficulties and defects of administration in New York and Brooklyn, under the various charters vouchsafed to us, from time to time, during this generation.

The Commissioners have recently organized, and are expected to proceed with discussions of the problems before them, so as to be able to submit the results of their deliberations to the present Legislature, if possible, for

action. It is no part of their duties to devise a project of a law having special reference to the City of New York only; but the facts from which to reach deductions for a general law, have been here advertised more glaringly than elsewhere in the United States, and have given New York an unenviable notoriety throughout the civilized world. The members of the Commission may well keep us particularly in mind, therefore, as they proceed.

It is understood that they will confine themselves to considerations *first:* of a general scheme to secure responsibility in administration in the local government of each of the many cities of the State; and *second:* of a measure of general application for regulating the amount and character of municipal debt which may be incurred in any city.

Whilst, in the present state of knowledge of the subject, the wisest and the best informed may doubt the sufficiency of any particular scheme to secure the object to be aimed at in the *second* inquiry, and which is receiving the careful study now of economists everywhere—the difficulties pre sented by the *first* inquiry have been recently, frequently and exhaustively investigated, and the solution has been stated with an unanimity almost unexampled.

One of the most vigorous of the writers upon the subject has summarized the results of the discussion in an article, published in 1870 in a leading daily newspaper with regard to the charter of that year, in these words:

"The principles on which any Constitution of "government, for a free people, must be founded are "few, simple and well ascertained. They have been "fully discussed and accurately laid down by eminent "publicists, and may be considered as well settled. Among "them is this: That there shall be a single executive head "to enforce the laws, appointing and removing all his im- "mediate subordinates, the heads of departments, who, in "turn, are to select and remove, and be responsible to "their chief for their agents and subordinates."

It may be remarked that in addition to the control exercised over the local Executive by the observation of intelligent citizens to whom he is responsible, and by the criticisms of an enlightened public press, a safeguard is already established for this City against an improper exercise of such power, were it given him, by the provision of the existing law, which subjects the Mayor himself to removal by the Governor—for conduct which is arbitrary, capricious or otherwise obnoxious to the public interests or to the rights of individuals.

FINANCES.

During the year 1875, there has been a decided improvement in the finances of the city, as compared with 1874.

I am informed by the Comptroller that during 1874 there were issued stocks and bonds amounting to $48,902,253.75, and that those falling due and paid off in

the same time amounted to but $39,231,121.97, leaving, January 1, 1875, an addition of $9,671,131.78 to the aggregate debt. But, whilst in 1875, there were issued stocks and bonds amounting to $35,806,539.62, those falling due and paid off in the same time amounted to $33,088,266.23, leaving, January 1, 1876, an apparent addition of $2,718,273.39 to the debt.

The figures for the year are as follows:

	Issued.	Paid off.
Stocks and Bonds payable from the Sinking Fund	$245,000 00	$2,133,900 00
Payable from taxation	3,899,346 30	1,195,100 00
Bonds payable from assessments	8,339,700 00	7,868,500 00
Revenue Bonds	23,322,493 32	21,890,766 23
	$35,806,539 62	$33,088,266 23

The Comptroller informs me that the indebtedness of the city outstanding January 1, 1876, and represented by stocks or bonds, is as follows:

FUNDED DEBT—

Payable from the Sinking Fund	$21,042,663 36	
" Taxation	98,014,240 18	
	$119,056,903 54	
Less actual amount in the Sinking Fund	27,902,544 52	
		$91,154,359 02

TEMPORARY DEBT—

Payable from assessments, and as security for which the city has the first lien, at 12 per cent. per annum, upon the real estate benefited by the improvements to pay for which the assessments are laid..	$21,322,200 00

REVENUE BONDS—

Issued during 1875, to raise moneys to meet appropriations for the year, anticipating the taxes for 1875, from which those bonds are payable, and which are now being paid from day to day.....	$4,142,927 85
Total apparent Debt.....	$116,619,486 87

The aggregate amount of those classes of the debt, on the 31st of December, 1874, as stated by the Comptroller, was $115,187,980. There is therefore an apparent increase during the last year of $1,431,506.87.

But the actual amount of the real indebtedness of the City (the Bonds payable from the Sinking Fund or from taxation, less the actual amount in the Sinking Fund) has been diminished. On the 31st of December, 1874, it was $91,625,779.24; on the 31st of December, 1875, as shown by the above schedule, it was only $91,154,359.02—a decrease of $471,420.22.

The apparent increase consists of bonds issued payable from assessments—and of Revenue Bonds issued to raise moneys for current expenses, in anticipation of taxes now

coming in every day. For its liability on those bonds, the City is perfectly secured—and they will be paid off in a short time.

That the credit of the City has improved is shown by the facts that, whilst most of the Bonds (other than Revenue Bonds) issued during 1874 bear 7 per cent. interest—all those (other than Revenue Bonds) issued during 1875 bear interest not exceeding 6 per cent.—and that the prices realized were about the same. The moneys raised on Revenue Bonds, are short loans—which were effected during 1875 on better terms than in 1874 because the money market for such loans has been better.

So far as I am aware, the floating debt of the City has not been increased during 1875—on the contrary, a substantial part of it outstanding at the beginning of the year has been liquidated, much of the money for that purpose having been raised by issuing, for judgments recovered during the year, bonds which are included in the above statement of the Funded Debt.

The revenues for the ordinary expenses of the government are from two sources: *First*, taxation; and *second*, the General Fund. All the revenues of the Corporation, not by law or otherwise specifically appropriated, are when received into the City Treasury, credited to what is known as the General Fund; and those revenues, together with the surplus revenues of the Sinking Fund for the payment

of interest on the city debt, are by law appropriated, and are exclusively applied, to the diminution of taxes.

The amount so applied in 1875 amounted to $4,000,000; and, at least an equal sum will be available in 1876.

The aggregate of the revenues of the General Fund, and the surplus in the interest account of the Sinking Fund, are increasing from year to year.

The amount of taxes ordered and required by the Board of Supervisors to be raised each year, is ascertained by deducting the estimated amount of the General Fund for the year (including the surplus of the interest account of the Sinking Fund), from the amount appropriated by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment—for the expenses of the City Government, for the proportion of State Taxes payable by the City, for Interest on the City debt, and for the various other purposes for which the City is by law required to provide the moneys.

The amount of the tax levy for 1875 was $32,171,472.23—having been reduced by an act of the last Legislature, which authorized $785,000 of the amount due in 1875 for the Fourth Avenue Improvement, to be raised by issuing bonds which are to be paid out of taxation in 1876. The amount to be raised by taxation in 1876, as determined by the appropriations for the year, will be $30,904,395.64—which includes the moneys to meet the bonds just mentioned; to which a small sum may be added by the Supervisors, to provide for possible deficiencies in the

amount actually produced by the taxes when collected There is therefore a decrease for 1876, as compared with 1875, of over $1,250,000 in the amounts to be raised by taxation.

Since 1872, when the conduct of work upon streets and avenues, up town, was transferred from the Park Department to the Department of Public Works, no public improvements have been commenced, except such as have been payable from assessments on the property benefited.

To realize money to prosecute such work, city bonds are issued, redeemable from a fund into which are received the amounts collected from the assessments, which are levied only when the improvements are completed.

The expenditures for improvements made from advances of proceeds of such bonds, were, during 1874, $4,583,447.21; and during 1875, $3,239,110.27, making a total for the two years of $7,822,557.48. The amount of assessment lists for completed improvements transmitted by the Department of Public Works to the Board of Assessors, to enable them to assess upon and collect from the holders of the property benefited, the amounts rateably due from each, were, during 1874, $6,247,717.34, and during 1875, $5,641,619.34—the lists transmitted in each year including an amount expended in the year previous. The amount of the assessment lists forwarded during the last two years thus exceeds the amount of moneys expended (and for which assessment bonds were issued) during those

two years by $4,066,779.20; and, if the assessments had been promptly collected from the property holders, there should now be a reduction of the temporary bonded indebtedness of the City in that amount. The fact is that instead of a reduction, there has been an actual increase of that part of the debt, as shown by the above schedule.

Early last year, in a special message to the Common Council, I called attention to the steady growth of that class of the debt, and suggested measures to be enacted to check it. The subject was afterwards discussed in the Legislature; but nothing has yet been done to supply a remedy. The number of bonds heretofore issued of that character, make now an addition of $21,394,100 to the debt for which interest must be provided from taxation. There should be legislation forbidding further issues until the entire amount outstanding is reduced by redemption to a maximum much smaller than the sum just mentioned; and an enactment should also be had requiring that no obligation payable from the proceeeds of bonds may be incurred by any Department beyond the limit of an appropriation to be made for it by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, after a careful estimate, by the Department by which the money is to be disbursed, of the amount demanded for the work. The estimates in each case of that kind, with a statement in detail of all the items and calculations which determine it, might be published in the *City Record*, for the information of the

holders of the property upon which the cost of the work is to be assessed—and the officer making it should be held to a strict account for completion of the work within the amount of the estimated cost.

With regard to obligations which may be incurred, payable from the proceeds of taxation, the law, as it now is, was apparently intended to limit them by the appropriations previously made for the specific object. The effect has been salutary; but the desired results cannot be fully attained until there shall be an amendment of the law to cure a present defect. Courts have held, in cases where no moneys of the amounts appropriated remained to the credit of the account against which claim was made, that there must be judgment against the city in an action for it, the amount being shown to have stood to the credit of the account at the time when the liability originated out of which the claim arose—even though at that very time there were outstanding contracts payable, as work under them progressed, out of the same account, and for amounts sufficient, in the aggregate, to absorb the whole of the appropriation. The reason for the decisions seems to be that, as the law now stands, persons dealing with the city cannot be charged with knowledge of the claims of others upon unexpended balances in the treasury. Judgments in cases of that kind can be met only with the proceeds of bonds issued expressly for them—and such bonds every year add to the public debt, for which interest, and ultimately the principal, must be provided out of taxation.

To meet that case, it is suggested that an amendment to the statute be made, requiring that a schedule, open to public inspection, be kept in each Department, and perhaps published in the *City Record*, not only of the amounts appropriated to each account, but also of the outstanding contracts and of the liabilities incurred, payable from each—and that every one proposing to deal with the Department must take notice of the fact, that, as there are no means provided with which to make payments under a contract with him, the contract itself, even if made by the Department, would be unauthorized, and could not be enforced against the city.

I solicit your co-operation in efforts to attain those ends —and your consideration of every other measure which may promise to diminish, if possible, the present volume of the debt—or at least prevent additions to it, except as corresponding reductions are made by redemption of obligations falling due. The present amount of outstanding bonds should be the maximum debt upon present resources.

It may fairly be claimed, now, that the flood which overflowed the city with debt during the last few years, has been at last got under control; and that—with proper co-operation between local officials—and reasonable compliance by the Legislature with representations to be made by the Common Council in matters such as are above referred to—the financial condition of the city will

be steadily ameliorated. Considering that fact—the improved character of the city administration, as compared with what it was but a short time ago—the great value of the property owned by the corporation—the amount of present revenues—and the extent of our resources in taxation—the credit of the city ought to stand at least as high as that of the United States. With proper management, our bonds should be marketed at a rate of interest not to exceed five per cent.—and for prices quite as good as they now sell for.

SINKING FUND.

There is a general misapprehension with regard to the Sinking Fund, which seems to be popularly supposed to be pledged for the principal of the whole amount of the indebtedness of the city. Were that the case, the Fund should, of course, be kept intact to secure redemption of the debt as it matures. But the fact is, that the Sinking Fund, which now amounts to $27,902,544.52, is pledged only for certain prescribed bonds and stocks, amounting in the aggregate to $21,042,663.36, maturing during and after 1876. Of that amount Water Stocks and Croton Bonds of several classes for, in the aggregate, $10,952,-492.36, are payable, principal and interest, from the Sinking Fund, and the principal, but not the interest, of Central Park Stocks of several classes, for, in the aggregate, $10,090,171, is payable also from that Fund. The interest account payable is now at the rate of about $600,000 per

annum; and as the principal of the stocks and bonds, on which that interest accrues, matures and is redeemed, the annual amount of interest payable is, of course, smaller and smaller.

The Sinking Fund itself is now largely in excess of the amount of the securities for which it is pledged, and the amount of interest earned by the investments of the fund is, annually, more than $1,000,000 in excess of the interest payable by it. An amount equal to that, being the annual surplus of the revenues for the payment of interest, is, as above stated, transferred, at the end of each year, to the General Fund (by authority of an act of 1862), and then used to reduce taxes. But the principal of the Sinking Fund, swollen by receipts, from many different sources which yield an aggregate revenue every year larger and larger, has been steadily increasing. It has grown nearly $10,000,000 since the end of 1870, notwithstanding all annual reductions to pay off maturing bonds and stocks, for the redemption of which it is pledged. At the end of 1872, the funded debt, payable from the Sinking Fund, was about equal to the amount of the Fund itself. But since then that debt has been redeemed as it has matured; and the surplus to the credit of the redemption account is now nearly $7,000,000 over and above the amount of obligations it has to meet. What shall be done with that surplus, is a question demanding prompt attention. So long as it remains, it is invested in obligations of the city, upon which nearly

$500,000 accrue as interest to be raised every year by taxation—though, as stated above, a larger sum is paid back to the taxpayer from the Sinking Fund, by the round about process of transfer to the General Fund used to reduce the taxes of the next year. If the Sinking Fund be reduced and kept to the amount of the value of the outstanding obligations to be met by it, the principal of the debt for which it is pledged will, of course, be perfectly secured; and it will still earn every year, from the securities in which it is invested, more than the amount which it is required to pay out as interest.

I recommend an inquiry on your part whether it may not be wise to relieve the tax-payers at once of a portion of their burdens—either (as has been suggested) by an amendment to the act of 1862 to authorize transfer, not only of the surplus of the interest account, but also of the surplus of the redemption account, to the General Fund, to be used to reduce taxes—or (as I myself prefer) by canceling, from time to time, bonds and stocks of the city which are held by the Sinking Fund, in amounts sufficient to keep down the surplus.

By the first plan, there will be a very large reduction of taxes in the year to which it is first applied; by the second, there will be a large and permanent reduction of the city debt—and that second course is the one which I recommend.

MUNICIPAL EXPENDITURES.

The appropriations for 1875 were $36,956,472.23, and the whole of that amount has been, or will be, spent to meet obligations of that year.

The appropriations for the year 1876, as finally determined by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, amount only to $34,904,395.64—showing a decrease, as compared with last year, of $2,052,076.59.

It is popularly supposed that the Board of Estimate and Apportionment has an effectual control over every part of the appropriations included in that aggregate sum; and that the members of that Board can properly be held responsible for the exercise of a discretion which might make still further and large reductions from all the appropriations.

This, however, is an error which is corrected by a very short inquiry into the provisions of the law. The fact is, that it is only with regard to a limited portion of the appropriations that the Board, or any branch of the City Government, has any discretion whatever. The reponsibility for the rest is upon the Legislature; and mandatory acts passed by it compel the appropriations.

In that final estimate of $34,904,395.64, there has been appropriated for—

State Taxes	$5,726,275 00
Common Schools for the State	1,506,914 48
Interest on the City Debt	9,503,188 93
Payment of Stocks and Bonds falling due.	2,064,313 14
Taxable Charities	883,140 00
State Taxes due to Westchester County (Chap. 629, Laws of 1875)	46,578 09
	$19,730,409 64

Acts of the Legislature provide for that sum of $19,730,409.64. With regard to it the Board of Estimate and Apportionment performs no function, except to make the appropriation of those amounts—as to them the law is mandatory. The Board has no discretion either to increase or to decrease the sums fixed at the figures stated.

In the balance of $15,173,986, the amount included for salaries alone, is $9,181,881 00

These salaries are divided into several classes—those fixed by the Legislature—those regulated by one or another of the several officers of the City Government—and those determined by the Board of Education.

Of the salaries fixed by the Legislature, there are those for—

The Police, including Commissioners and force	$3,152,400 00
The Fire Department, including Commissioners and force	888,810 00
The Judiciary	1,215,595 00
The Mayor, Aldermen, Chamberlain, and heads of Departments (excepting Commissioners of Police, of the Fire Department, and of the Dock Department)	229,500 00
Total	$5,486,305 00

The salaries paid to school teachers and others employed by the Board of Education are determined by that Board, which is not a Department of the City Government or subject in this respect to any control by the City Government. The amount appropriated for those salaries for 1876 is $2,700,000.

For the salaries regulated by one or another of the several officers of the City Government, the appropriations for 1876 are, for the—

Finance Department	$170,000 00
Law Department	95,000 00
Department of Public Works	100,000 00
Department of Public Parks	158,500 00

Department of Buildings	$66,000 00
Department of Charities and Correction	263,500 00
Health Department	108,500 00
Department of Taxes and Assessments	102,500 00
Mayoralty	20,000 00
Bureau of Permits	12,000 00
Common Council	20,000 00
Police Department (Clerks, etc.)	50,000 00
Fire Department (Clerks, etc.)	159,276 00
Miscellaneous	21,500 00
	$1,346,776 00

In each Department, the amount of salary paid to any subordinate is determined by the head of that Department. The Board of Estimate and Apportionment has only an indirect influence over it, by fixing the aggregate amount which may be distributed as salaries in each Department.

The reductions so made for 1876, for salaries in Departments of the City Government, amount to over 20 per cent. of the sums allowed for the same salaries in 1875.

Deducting the amount appropriated for State Taxes and Common Schools for the State, etc.; for interest on and payment of installments of principal of City Debt; for taxable charities; and for salaries—from the entire appropriations for the year—there remains a balance of only $5,992,105 00

—which is the amount available as a fund for the ordinary purposes of the City Government, among which the following special appropriations are comprised:

Supplies for Department of Public Charities and Correction, including amount for Out-door Poor	$840,000 00
Cleaning Streets	725,000 00
Supplies, Repairs, etc., for Public Schools.	500,000 00
Lamps and Gas	700,000 00
Maintenance and Government of Parks and Places	187,500 00
Maintenance and Government of Public Places; rebuilding and repairing bridges; and surveying to be done in 23d and 24th Wards	80,000 00
New apparatus, buildings, etc., for the Fire Department	200,000 00
Supplies, rents, repairs, etc., for the Police Department	162,075 00
Fees of Sheriff, Coroners, Jurors and Witnesses	131,000 00
Election Expenses	139,250 00
College of the City of New York	150,000 00
Contingencies of Departments, etc	86,210 00
Supplies for and cleaning Public Offices.	70,000 00

Printing, Stationery, and Blank Books...	$130,000 00
Repairing and Maintaining Croton Aqueduct.....	100,000 00
School moneys to Corporate Schools.....	103,000 00
Judgments.....	75,000 00
Repairing and Renewal of Pipes, etc....	75,000 00
Rents.....	82,700 00
Sewers—repairing and cleaning.....	100,000 00
Assessments and taxes on corporation property...	50,000 00
Repairing stone pavements.....	100,000 00
Repairing and keeping in order wooden and concrete pavements.....	50,000 00
Removal of night soil, etc.....	40,000 00
Small Pox Hospital.....	40,540 00

For those expenditures, the aggregate amount appropriated for 1876 is considerably less than that allowed for 1875—though it is thought that the economy, to be practised in them as in all other disbursements of public moneys, will secure all the results required at present.

In this connection it seems proper to call your attention to the enormous amount of money expended for the Judiciary. A number of citizens have, from time to time, remonstrated with me on the subject—erroneously supposing that the City Government has an undisputed power to cut down those sums. The fact is that all the judges, including those of the Police and District

Courts, are held to be State officers; and not only are their salaries prescribed by acts of the Legislature, but they have or claim the power to select and continue in office all the various court officers and attendants, at salaries also prescribed by the Legislature. It is insisted that the City Government has no authority whatever with regard to them. The Board of Estimate and Apportionment sent, however, to all of the Judges, during the summer and autumn, circulars calling their attention to the subject and appealing to them to cooperate in efforts to reduce expenses. In compliance with those requests, the Superior Court and the Court of Common Pleas made substantial reductions in their estimates for clerks and attendants—which, added to amounts deducted by the Board in cases in which it seems to be authorized to do so, make the appropriations for the Judiciary for 1876, $46,480.40 less than for 1875--independent of the amounts in which certain salaries of Judges and others were reduced by the Legislature, by chapter 480, Laws of 1875.

LAW DEPARTMENT.

Immediately upon entering office in January last, I found it necessary to institute proceedings of inquiry into the administration of the Law Department by E. Delafield Smith, the then Counsel to the Corporation. On the 3d of February, I forwarded to the Governor a certificate of

Mr. Smith's removal from office. On the 6th of August the Governor approved the removal; and I thereupon appointed William C. Whitney to the vacancy. He has reorganized the Department, and affairs there are now conducted with results better than the city has had from that branch of the administration for many years.

Upon his accession, he found that much of the business of the city was done by special counsel, not always selected because of eminence at the bar, and with offices scattered all about the city; to them the entire conduct of important cases was handed over, and all the papers in such cases were sent to them. The results were not always satisfactory in any sense—and how expensive the system was, appears from the fact that, although the appropriation applicable for such use in 1875 was $100,000—the unpaid bills of special counsel already presented for services previous to Mr. Whitney's appointment, exceed the appropriation out of which they are payable by about $120,000! One bill is for $119,000—rendered by counsel to whom has already been paid nearly $20,000 during the time it covers!

The force, employed in the office proper, was inadequate to sufficient examination of either the law or the facts of cases to be tried by it; it appears to have been the custom to defend every case upon which the Auditing Bureau of the Finance Department, without consultation, perhaps, as to the law affecting the claim, had refused payment—

and to go into court with little other knowledge of the facts than such as was furnished by the Auditor's report. The consequence was a vast amount of unsuccessful litigation, entailing large expense to the city for costs of court and for interest on claims in which judgments were recovered.

All that has now been changed. All cases in the office are thoroughly scrutinized there before going into court; in those which do not present good grounds for resistance, no defense is made; of those tried or in which motions have been argued during the last two months, the city has been successful in at least two-thirds—a record surpassed, I am told, by but few law offices in conducting litigations for clients. As the result of an arrangement recently made between the Comptroller and the Counsel to the Corporation —and by which it is understood that claims will not be finally refused payment by the Auditing Bureau of the Finance Department without full consultation as to the law and the facts—it is expected that there will be hereafter fewer suits to be lost by the city.

As an illustration of the improvements in the Bureaus of this Department, it may be mentioned that the sums paid over by the present Corporation Attorney, between September 1 (the date of his appointment) and December 31, collected as costs and penalties in proceedings for violations of ordinances, etc., amount to $4,477.04 —whereas the sum paid over by his predecessor, during

the time between January 1 and September 1, was only $2,089.08.

The appropriations for the Law Department for 1876 (including the Bureau of the Corporation Attorney, and the Bureau of the Public Administrator,) amount to $161,000, being $31,850 less than for the year 1875.

DEPARTMENT OF TAXES.

As the Department of Taxes and Assessments is at present organized, the functions imposed upon it are performed with fidelity to public duty and a proper regard to the rights of individual citizens.

The appropriation for expenses of the office during 1875, amounted to $129,800; the sum allowed for 1876, is $120,000—a reduction of $9,800.

STATE TAXATION.

The so-called equalization of State Taxes continues to be the source of injustice and loss to this city. At the request of the Common Council, a commission, consisting of Tax Commissioner George H. Andrews, Wilson G. Hunt and Isaac Sherman, was appointed by me in August to present to the State Board of Equalization our claim for

justice. The duty was promptly and thoroughly performed.

The assessed value of the real estate in this city for 1874, which was the subject of the action of that Board in 1875, was $881,547,995. Notwithstanding the representations made to the Board that this assessment bore a larger proportion to a full value than the average assessments in the State, there was imposed upon us an additional valuation of $51,502,404 for the professed purpose of raising the assessment of this city to the general average. The effect of that act, which had no better justification than the mere power to enforce it, is to impose upon the City of New York more than fifty per cent. of the whole State tax, or over $1,000,000 in excess of the requirements of an equitable apportionment.

It is but just to say that this action was opposed by a minority of the State Board. The majority, however, impervious to argument, acted upon the principle, probably, that a million more or less could make little difference to a city already so heavily burdened, and totally without representation in that Board.

PUBLIC WORKS.

On the 1st of March last, George M. Van Nort, for three years theretofore Commissioner of Public Works,

resigned the office, and Fitz John Porter was appointed in his stead. The change resulted in a partial reorganization of the Department, and in a great improvement in the efficiency of the service.

This Department has control of (among other things) public buildings, public sewers, and works of drainage; and of all structures and property connected with the supply and distribution of Croton water. It is charged with the duty of (among other things) opening, altering, regulating, grading, flagging, curbing, guttering and lighting streets, roads, places and avenues; of constructing and repairing public roads; filling sunken lots; paving, repaving and repairing streets, and keeping them clear of obstructions; and of collecting the revenues arising from the use or sale of Croton water. The business is conducted through eight Bureaus, each of which has important functions. The extent of the operations of the Department may be perceived from the facts that the attention of its officers is constantly required by not only the works of construction in progress, but by 270 miles of street pavements, 12½ miles of boulevards, and about 50 miles of streets regulated and graded but not yet paved; by 351.66 miles of sewers, with 4,309 receiving-basins; and by 20.139 street lamps—and that it supplies, and, through 409.21 miles of mains, distributes 105,000,000 gallons of Croton water daily—being 100 gallons to each of the inhabitants every day. The revenues received by the city from the use of Croton water are about $1,250,000, or $1.23 from each

inhabitant, per annum. During 1875, the Department, among other works of public improvement, constructed 12.67 miles of sewers, culverts and drains, with 129 receiving-basins.

The appropriations for the Department for 1875 were $1,582,000; for the current year they are $1,434,000—the reduction being much larger than it appears, because in the appropriation for 1876 is included an amount necessary for rebuilding and repairing sewers during the year, for which purpose moneys were heretofore provided not out of taxation but by issuing bonds. The Act which authorized such bonds was repealed by the last Legislature.

In the City Government, this Department has been the chief employer of labor, though prosecuting many enterprises through contractors. All works carried on, whether by contractors or by laborers receiving wages by the day directly from the city, are subject to inspection as they progress. During the last year, inspection by the Department has been more thorough and exacting than ever before, though there is still much room for improvement. The work done in 1875, whether by contractors or by day's wages, has been of better quality than in 1874; and that the new administration has been more economical than its predecessor was, is made evident by an examination of the tables of prices paid.

When the spring opened, and work upon the up-town improvements was resumed, a reduction of wages was

made, from the rates which had been paid by the department since the spring of 1872. Within that time the salaries of all officers and employees of the City Government had been reduced—many of them fifty per cent., others more; measures, since successful, had been instituted for reduction of the salaries of all the judicial and County officers in the City whose cases could be reached by legislation; and, in the general shrinkage of values, as we passed from the era of the inflation and extravagance which had characterized and had followed the war, the market rates of wages, for a day of ten hours' work had fallen some thirty-five or forty per cent. lower than the rates then still paid by the City for the statutory day of eight hours upon public works.

Under such circumstances, the Commissioner simply did his duty as a public officer charged with the disbursement of public funds—and reduced the wages paid by the Department, to an approximation to the rates prevailing in the market and paid by individuals. This measure—instituted in concert with another (and as it was at the time supposed, with all) of the several Departments which employ laborers—has been the occasion for expressions of disapproval by some who honestly consider it a mistake; it has also been the theme of declamations by others who have had ends of their own to serve by fomenting discontent among the laboring classes.

I am at a loss to perceive how the Commissioner could

have done otherwise than as he did under the circumstances—having in view, among other considerations, the fact that the public improvements, upon which the laborers have been employed, are ultimately paid for by assessments upon the property supposed to be immediately benefited—the owners of that property, already oppressed by the heavy burden of taxation and of the general stagnation in business, having had no voice in determining that the improvement should be commenced, no option to prosecute the works at their own expense and by methods which, as employed by private persons, may nearly always be expected to secure results cheaper if not better than those which attend upon public undertakings of that kind. The laborers employed should be enabled, by arrangements for keeping them more continuously at work while their names remain on the pay-roll, to make, at proper rates per day, larger aggregate average earnings, week in and week out, than they have heretofore been able to secure with the interruptions to work which now occur. But, for public officers to take without compensation the private property of unconsenting citizens and distribute it to public employees—and that is just what has been asked to be done for those in the pay of this Department, in claiming for them wages much above the market rates—is a method of plundering not likely to be long tolerated by any free people.

The reports of the Department show that the works of public improvement heretofore prosecuted by day's wages

are now nearly or quite completed, and that it is now possible to conduct all the remaining works by contract. It appears that the contract system was not tried early in the spring, upon all the public improvements then in progress, only because the condition in which some of them were found by the present Commissioner was such as to make it almost impossible to estimate the cost of completion with the accuracy necessary, as the basis of a satisfactory arrangement with responsible and approved contractors.

There should now be careful consideration by you, as by all others in any measure responsible for the local administration, of the general question, whether public works should be done by contract or by day's wages—concerning which, it is well to recollect, that the State Government has recently been discussing the evils inherent in the systems of public contracts heretofore pursued, and that the facts thus brought to light have startled the community.

I venture here to suggest that the question, as commonly presented, involves the error of expecting to find a remedy for the evils of one system by changing to the other; and that this is not the proper solution. There are some kinds of work which can best be done by contract, others which can be best done by day's work. The condition which underlies each system, and which alone can ensure good work, is thorough inspection

—and that can be had under either. It is better to provide for this, and then to apply each system to the work to which it is appropriate, than to alternate from one system to the other, and thus incur the evils of each in turn.

I recommend that all public works be done by contract, where the conditions are such as to secure reliable proposals by responsible contractors.

FIRE DEPARTMENT.

Upon my accession to the Mayoralty, I received from my predecessor a report from the Commissioners of Accounts, just made to him and disclosing facts upon which were based charges affecting the integrity of the Fire Commissioners—particularly in the matters of contracts for supplies to the Department, and of some of the selections by them made of subordinate employees in and about Headquarters.

After a thorough investigation which resulted in further proofs to sustain the allegations, after communications to me voluntarily made by one of the Commissioners who corroborated the information thus gathered, and after a formal hearing accorded to them upon the charges, on the 3d of February I transmitted to the Governor a certificate removing all of the Commissioners from office. A few days afterwards, I forwarded to him various papers show-

ing the several steps in the proceedings—but I am not advised that he has taken final action upon the case. On the 1st of May the term of one of the Commissioners expired, and Vincent C. King was appointed. A thorough business training, and long familiarity with the nature and requirements of the service, have enabled him to check many of the abuses theretofore existing, and to effect decided reductions in the estimates of moneys needed during the current year.

Notwithstanding the discredit necessarily attaching to Headquarters because of the removals made but which have not yet taken effect, the officers and men of the various fire companies have admirably performed their duties and, by thoroughness of discipline and great efficiency as an organization, they fully maintain the reputation of the service as perhaps the best Fire Department in the country.

The appropriations for 1875 were $1,316,000; for 1876 a reduction of $67,914 has been made, without affecting the amount of salaries of the force.

POLICE DEPARTMENT.

For more than a year past, there has been a general want of confidence in the management of the Police—uttered not only by individual citizens, but by the unanimous voice of the Press.

From assurances made to me by several of the Police Commissioners, during the early months of my administration, I was led to hope that this would be corrected by reforms expected to be prosecuted after the 1st of May, when a vacancy occurred in the Board, to which General William F. Smith was appointed—selected for the place, in order that, by his experience as a soldier, and his ability as an administrative officer, he might compel a more thorough discipline in the force, and a better scheme for responsibility among the Captains and Inspectors. He promptly instituted proper measures to secure those results; but the co-operation of two of the Commissioners, necessary to success in enforcing the reforms, was withheld, and finally, in September, the Department was formally presented by the Grand Jury for inefficiency and demoralization.

Charges against the Board were thereupon made—and each of the Commissioners was given an opportunity to be heard, why he should not be removed from office. General Smith and Mr. Voorhis, admitting the deplorable condition of affairs and their inability to correct them without co-operation in a Board which consists of four members, immediately tendered their resignations. The others attempted a defense which was entirely inadequate; and they would have been at once removed, but for the fact that the general election was at hand and fears were entertained that changes, made then, might be an occasion for misrepresentation that it was intended to

interfere with so much of the machinery of the elections as is by law under the control of the Police Department. On the 4th day of November, however, my certificate was forwarded to the Governor, removing Messrs. Matsell and Disbecker from office—and on the 31st of December he approved of the removals. As stated by me in my first message to the Common Council, and repeatedly since—with the concurrence of the press and the leaders of both political parties, and with the approval of the community at large—I am in favor of a non-partisan Police Board, in the fullest sense of that term. The police system should not be managed under party influence, or for political purposes.

The new year has been auspiciously inaugurated by the reorganization of the Board—of which General Smith is now President, and Messrs. John R. Voorhis, De Witt Clinton Wheeler and Joel B. Erhardt are associate members. From the high character and recognized capacity of those gentlemen, it may be expected that the city will now enjoy the benefits to be conferred by a Police Department which is efficient in every respect, and deserves the confidence of all good citizens.

The appropriations for 1875 were $4,187,325; for 1876, they are $4,089,475—a reduction of $97,850.

CHARITIES AND CORRECTIONS.

The Department of Charties and Corrections is charged with the control of all the City Prisons, Hospitals, Reformatories and Charitable Institutions—it also affords relief, in the shape of food, etc., and of medical attendance, to a large number of out-door poor. Under the present Board, the Department is conducted with many reforms of the administration of its predecessor.

The average number of inmates of the several institutions for the year 1875, was over 10,000—classified as follows:

Prisoners—		
In the Penitentiary	947	
In the City Prisons	561	
In the Work-house	1,991	
		3,499
Paupers		1,335
Lunatics		2,060
Hospitals		1,657
Children		1,519

The expenditures for 1875, as compared with 1874, show a considerable decrease in the item of salaries, but an increase in the amounts spent for supplies and repairs. The Commissioners have greatly improved the kinds and added to the quantities of the rations furnished to the sick

and insane; and have complied with the wishes of a large and respectable class of the citizens by affording to the Faculty of Homœopathic Physicians the use of a Hospital otherwise unoccupied, on Ward's Island, in which to practise their own methods of treatment. The recent law which provides for placing all healthy children heretofore in the public nurseries, asylums and reformatory schools, between the ages of three and sixteen years, in families or institutions not within the jurisdiction of the Department, has been carried into effect. The object of this statute was evidently to remove one of the agencies for the promotion of pauperism. It is too soon to predict the results which may come of this innovation; but if it shall promote the desired end of insuring places for these waifs where they will have a chance to become useful and to learn to acquire an independence, it will prove beneficial.

Perhaps the most notable of the improvements instituted under the present administration is the Training School for Nurses, which, in August last, was opened at Charity Hospital, Blackwell's Island. The requisites for admission are that the applicants shall be women, between the ages of 20 and 35 years, recommended by clergymen and physicians, and in good health. The inducement offered is a thorough education in practical and theoretical nursing by means of instruction at the bed-side, and by lectures delivered by members of the medical staff of the Hospital. Of the numerous ap-

plicants, forty-six have been accepted, of whom four have left and forty-two remain—all of them intelligent and respectable young women.

The first twenty-one nurses admitted are in charge of wards, the remainder are assistants. Each nurse remains for three months, at a time, in charge of a medical, surgical, uterine, obstetrical and venereal ward, first as assistant, afterwards as head nurse. Two lectures are delivered to them each week, in the amphitheatre of the Hospital, by visiting Physicians and the Chief of Staff. House Physicians give them daily instructions in the wards. In the library for nurses are all the standard medical text books. By dismissing the former nurses, and instituting this method, the discipline in the wards and the condition of them as to cleanliness have been materially improved. The patients now receive constant care and attention, day and night; and the nurses thus trained are given an occupation, by which to earn a comfortable income during the rest of their lives, whilst serving as useful assistants to practising physicians.

The Commissioners reiterate their urgent representations that the City Prison, known as the "Tombs," is now inadequate for the number of prisoners, and unfit for the uses, for which it is required.

The appropriations for 1875 were $1,183,000; for 1876 they are $1,122,000—a reduction of $61,000.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT.

As at present organized, the Board of Health consists—of the Health Officer of the Port, who is appointed by the State as a guard against the introduction of epidemics and contagious diseases from abroad; of the President of the Board of Police, who is thus enabled to bring intelligently the co-operation of the Police Department; and of two Health Commissioners, one medical, the other not medical, but an expert in sanitary chemistry. Like every well regulated machine, it has worked quietly but efficiently during the past year. Perhaps the most noticeable improvement recently instituted by it has been the Small-pox Hospital (Riverside), and the Vaccination Bureau. Over 115,000 persons have been vaccinated by this corps since it was organized in October, 1874, nearly all of the work having been done during 1875; and vaccine virus sufficient for 13,000 persons more has been furnished to public institutions gratuitously. A change for the better has been made in the treatment of small-pox patients; and the Board earnestly represents that there should be an act of the Legislature requiring all persons to be vaccinated.

In addition to much other work, the Department has endeavored to correct such evils as the offensive and malarial exhalations from Harlem flats; and has insisted

upon improvements in the drainage and ventilation of dwelling houses—by defects in which typhoids and other low fevers, and diptheria and other such fatal diseases, are caused or developed. Under the directions of the Sanitary Inspectors, the atmosphere of many dwellings has, during the last year, been made wholesome by an extension of the soil-pipes through the roofs, and, by thus furnishing an escape for the sewer-gases which had theretofore given to closets, bath-rooms and fixed basins an offensive odor, the rooms have been purified of the poisons which affect the health of the inmates of all houses in which such improvements are not introduced. The attention of every householder is called to this subject.

By an arrangement with the Department of Buildings, the plans for no tenement or dwelling are now approved until plans for the soil-pipes and plumbing proposed to be placed in the house are submitted to and approved by the Health Department. It is expected that evils which have recently been much discussed in the newspapers, and from which the city has long suffered, will be thus corrected.

The appropriations for this Department for 1875, amounted to $222,000; for 1876, they are $220,000—a reduction of $2,000.

PARK DEPARTMENT.

In the Park Department, the expenditures for maintenance in 1875 have been about five per cent. less than in 1874, and greater results have been produced for the money. The change in the Superintendent, and in the command of the police force, has produced greater efficiency. Most of the architectural structures and of the bridges in the Central Park have been put in complete re pair. The paths and walks there are also in good order. The unfinished works of new walks, roads and bridges have been substantially completed. What remains of this work can be finished in the early months of the ensuing spring, so that then the area of the Central Park will be in a completed condition—except the gates, a portion of the enclosing walls at the northern end, and the interior slopes adjacent to those unfinished walls.

The plans which have been heretofore prepared for the elevated portions of the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Wards have been held under consideration, and measures have been taken for a new plan to replace them. The objections suggested to the old plans—excessive cost and inadequate design—will be met by the thorough study given to the necessary conditions to secure results satisfactory to the property-owners and beneficial to the City at large. It is important that the plans be completed during the year 1876, and this may be expected.

The two bridges over the Harlem river are constantly out of repair—that at the Third avenue because of excessive weight—and the Central bridge (Macomb's Dam) because of age and weakness of structure. The interruption to travel on either of them is an inconvenience to many people. The Central bridge ought to be rebuilt; and, as this is postponed, the expenses of keeping it in repair are necessarily heavy. The Third avenue bridge needs a steam engine to work the draw with rapidity, to obviate the detentions now so embarrassing to those who must use it. The Department has made preparations for two more bridges—a suspension bridge half a mile north of the High Bridge, and a bridge at Madison avenue; but the requisitions for money to proceed with them have not been met by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment.

The Museum of Natural History has been enclosed for a year; and of the Museum of Art the external walls and the roof frame have been erected. No progress has been made with the Museum of Natural History during the past season, because of delay in preparing the plans. Both are now in a condition in which the work can go steadily forward.

Much progress has been made toward completing the fountains and other unfinished details, in the other city parks. It is important to complete Tompkin's Square; and operations there have been commenced. The walks

in the City Hall Park should be relaid. These works can be finished early in the spring.

The result of the attention given, during the past year, to the necessity for completing unfinished work on the Central Park and other city parks, and putting them in order, at a small expense, will be creditable to the city, when the parks are subjected to the observation and criticism of visitors, from other countries, who may be expected here during the coming year.

The appropriations for 1875 amounted to $584,000; for 1876, they are $495,000—a reduction of $89,000.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

All the officers of this Department are practical architects, house-carpenters or masons. They are required to see that the provisions of law are enforced, with regard to the manner of construction or the materials to be used in the erection, alteration or repair of any building in the city—to secure strength and durability, protection for property against fire and safety for persons in case of fire. As the Department is at present constituted, the duties are performed more thoroughly than heretofore.

The following statistics will prove of interest at this time:

	1875.	1874.	1873.	1872.
Plans for new buildings filed	811	864	825	691
Number of buildings embraced in them	1,392	1,388	1,311	1,281
Of which there were approved	730	755	681	567
" " there were amended and approved	45	85	134	114
" " there were wholly rejected	36	24	10	10
Estimated cost of same.	$18,065,770	$16,786,077	$22,276,645	$21,944,330
Plans for alterations filed	1,191	1,308	1,043	796
Number of buildings embraced in them	1,245	1,429	1,139	890
Of which there were approved	1,062	1,166	967	704
" " there were amended and approved	31	84	58	69
" " there were wholly rejected	98	58	18	23
Estimated cost of same.	$3,186,888	$3,532,147	$3,496,995	$2,788,379
New buildings commenced	1,062	1,178	1,167	1,360
New buildings completed	1,127	1,295	1,469	1,662
Alterations commenced.	923	1,231	998	894
Alterations completed.	1,096	1,267	1,030	1,015
Fire escapes reported defective	1,596	1,436	2,215	546
Fire escapes provided	2,040	2,197	1,453	216
Fire escapes prosecuted.	298	111	121	17
Unsafe buildings reported	1,609	1,546	953	438
Unsafe buildings made safe	1,573	1,466	819	398
Unsafe buildings taken down	90	67	58	38
Unsafe buildings prosecuted	142	24	18	22
Violations of law reported	814	817	569	513
Violations of law removed	702	720	607	429
Violations of law prosecuted	184	112	97	60

The appropriations for 1875 were $95,000; for 1876 they are $75,000—a reduction of $20,000.

DOCKS.

The Board governing the Dock Department has, since May last, been reorganized, and is now in a condition of efficiency.

Many important works of construction or of repair are in progress; and some have been completed in 1875. Several months ago, the new Engineer-in-Chief reported, as the result of a preliminary examination made by him, that the condition of the bulkhead wall then in process of construction on the North river front, at King and Canal streets, was such as to excite grave apprehension. The work there and elsewhere on that front, was therefore suspended to await the report of a Commission of eminent Civil Engineers appointed to ascertain the precise facts and to advise with regard to it and to the plans of construction to be hereafter pursued in building the bulkhead wall. They have conducted careful investigations, but have made as yet only a preliminary report—which justifies solicitude in respect to the work under investigation, of which the original cost, however, was only about $100,000.

Notwithstanding the present dullness of trade, it is not

now possible to provide adequate accommodations for the traffic which seeks an entrance to or outlet from the city by shipping, steamers, railroads and river craft, on the North river front, and within the limits of the region in which such business is done. Improvements there will be judiciously prosecuted; and the construction of terminal facilities for moving the freights of commerce should be provided or encouraged as rapidly as possible, to reduce the extraordinary accumulation of charges now made at this port for handling freights, and which are in such excess of those found at either Boston, Philadelphia or Baltimore, as to place New York, in competition with them, at a temporary disadvantage—though this city enjoys a natural superiority to either of those rivals. That cause, and the combinations made between railroad companies which have carried freights at rates, until recently maintained, discriminating against New York, have, I think largely contributed to the unfavorable results of commercial enterprises here during 1875.

The amounts collected by the Department from rents of wharf property, are paid over to the City Chamberlain and placed to the credit of the Sinking Fund. Those amounts are steadily increasing; in 1865 they were but $272,415.61; in 1875 they were considerably in excess of $600,000, and larger than ever before. The difference between the revenue derived from those sources in 1870, and that received in 1875, is now a sum about 70 per cent, of the annual interest on the whole amount expended by

the Department during that time in improving the water front. In 1875, the Board leased, by public sale and otherwise—on the East river, 20 piers, 21 half piers and 15 bulkheads—and on the North river, 30 piers, 2 half piers and 9 bulkheads. The rents for which those leases were made, are believed to be the full value of the use of the premises.

Since May last, the Board has made a larger reduction in the salary account—which is now at the rate of $30,201.25 per annum—but previous to May last, was at the rate of $55,300 per annum—a decrease of nearly 46 per cent.

And, whilst the amount expended by the Department during 1874 was (in round numbers) $1,700,000, the expenditures during 1875 have been only about $700,000.

Those and all other expenses of the Department are payable, under the present law, not out of taxation, but from the proceeds of bonds which must be issued by the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund, upon the requisition of the Board governing the Department. That system is altogether wrong and, though not likely to be abused at present, should be changed.

It may be stated here that, for some years, the Union Ferry Company has had the use of valuable franchises and dock property belonging to the city, at a nominal rental of one dollar per year. I recently caused a resolu-

tion to be prepared, which was adopted by the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund, requesting the Counsel to the Corporation for an opinion as to the legality of that lease. His opinion indicates that the lease is illegal. The Commissioners of the Sinking Fund have therefore directed proceedings to be taken to have it annulled; and a proper return for the property may be secured for the City Treasury. The revenue derived from that source, prior to the present lease, was over $100,000 per year; and, with the increase of travel by an increased population, the franchise and property should now yield the city an income larger than that was.

BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The public schools continue to afford to the citizens cause for satisfaction and pride. Without them, it might be doubted whether free institutions could long be maintained for a city like this—with the distance between capital and labor growing wider every year—and with a population of youth recruited every year, not only from many of the best, but also from many of the worst elements of human society. The number of teachers in 1875 was 3,257. The whole number of scholars taught in 1874 was 251,532; in 1875 it was 253,894. The actual average daily attendance was of 117,231 scholars in 1874, and 119,853 in 1875. There is class-room for 151,814 scholars.

Those figures include the Normal College and Training School and the Saturday Sessions for teachers—which, in 1875, were attended by more students than ever before, and were admirably maintained at a cost of about $85,000.

The whole amount of the expenses of the Board of Education in 1875 was $3,346,912.44; the appropriations for 1876 are $3,689,500—this being the only respect in which the amounts allowed for the current year exceed the sums expended in 1875.

RAPID TRANSIT.

In my first message last year, I called attention to the urgent necessity for improved methods for rapid communication between distant localities within the city limits. The subject was again brought to the consideration of the Common Council in a communication from me on the 28th of January, recommending appointment of a special committee, to investigate the subject by hearing all the parties more particularly interested, and to report the measures ascertained to be most feasible and best adapted to the necessary conditions of such a work. That Committee forwarded to the Legislature a bill, which—with the intelligent and active co-operation of the public press—and after the members of the Board of Aldermen had gone in a body to Albany, accompanied by a memorial from the Mayor, to re-enforce the efforts of some of the members of the Senate and Assembly, representing this locality, and to

insist upon the relief demanded—was finally passed by the Legislature, notwithstanding the combination against it of many opposing interests. The first step thus taken, was followed by the passage of a second bill (introduced by Hon. James W. Husted, and popularly known as the Husted bill), incorporating the provisions of the first and avoiding difficulties which, in the full discussion given to the subject, had been suggested as likely to arise in view of recent amendments to the Constitution. That measure became a law after receiving the signature of the Governor, who had ably seconded the efforts of the local government. Under it, the Mayor promptly appointed five Commissioners, chosen because of exceptional qualifications—who, after devoting several months to thorough examination of the various propositions submitted to them, have reported the routes selected and the plans of construction determined by them for elevated steam railways through the streets. As allowed by the law, concessions were made to each of two corporations, theretofore existing and controlled by capitalists of liberal ideas and large means; a third company was incorporated and organized by the Commissioners after subscribers had come forward to furnish the whole amount of the proposed capital.

The routes selected were immediately sanctioned by the Board of Aldermen; and everything now seems favorable to realization of the wishes of the citizens generally concerning Rapid Transit—after encountering and over-

coming obstacles which, until now, have sufficed to defeat each of the many enterprises inaugurated during the last fifteen years to attain the object.

At least one line of elevated steam railways is to be constructed as soon as possible, making the circuit of the city, upon a route convenient of access; and completion of the sections most urgently needed is promised during the current year. Provision has been made for frequent special trains, which are to be run during the hours of the morning and evening when the laboring classes are going to or from work—at half the low rates of fares allowed to be charged on the other trains; and it is hoped that those who depend upon daily labor here may thus be enabled to place their families in salubrious homes near the city—away from crowded tenement-houses, but within convenient reach of the workshops and other places of business to which they must go.

The burden of taxation is expected to be lightened by Rapid Transit—by appreciating property now nearly or quite unavailable for use by those who have daily occupations in the city, and thus distributing more equally throughout the area to be covered by the population which affords our taxable fund—and by attracting within the city numbers who now add wealth to neighboring localities only because such places have heretofore been more accessible than the upper end of Manhattan Island or the new districts of New York.

It is to be considered also that the construction of a railway of the kind prescribed by the Commissioners, along a street, will depreciate only temporarily, if at all the adjoining property—and will ultimately enhance its value. The owners of premises upon any of the routes selected should regard that result and their share of the benefit to the city at large, as satisfaction for what they may at present feel disposed to consider a local disadvantage.

CONCLUSION.

The Centennial year upon which we have just entered is to be celebrated in the city where the Independence of these United States was declared and their Union under the present constitution of government established—by an Exposition collecting the best products of the arts, the sciences and the industries of our own and of foreign nations.

It is not within the powers conferred upon us to appropriate any part of the public moneys to the assistance of an object, which, nevertheless, engages our patriotic sympathy, and which should command among all our fellow-citizens, in their private and individual capacities, an effective aid and co-operation.

But it is within our power to mark and to celebrate the beginning of the second century of our Republican

liberties and Government, at home also, by perfecting as we may within the prescribed sphere of our official duties as the representatives and servants of the people in this metropolitan municipality, that Government of the people by the people for the people, which so many years ago was launched in the full tide of successful experiment.

We have not to deal with foreign wars or civil strife. Our affairs come even closer to men's business and homes. But here, as much as upon any broader field, it behooves us to be faithful to our trusts—to be frugal and sparing, since the taxes we collect are the sweat of honest industry—to be painstaking and exacting, that the taxes we spend may procure that full and faithful service which in all parts of the public business and government is the people's rightful due.

The frugality which ensures private prosperity needs to be re-enforced by frugality in the public expense, in order that we may recover from the costly excesses and errors of the past, renew our prosperity in its sources, and justify our pride in Democratic self-government and our faith in its sufficiency for the untried perils of another century.

WILLIAM H. WICKHAM,
Mayor.

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